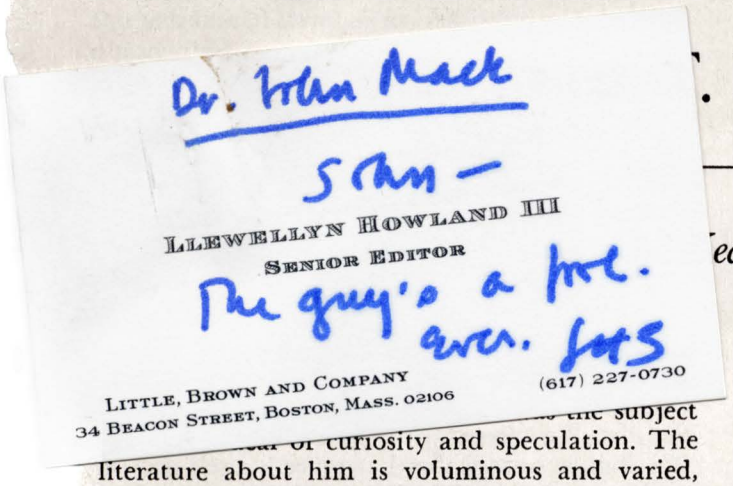
Commentary July 1977



. E. Lawrence

edourie

of curiosity and speculation. The literature about him is voluminous and varied, ranging from accounts of his military career during World War I and his political activities afterward, to investigations of his private life, and explanations—sometimes involved and farfetched, and sometimes downright sensational—of his personality and behavior.

The Lawrence corpus—as we may call it—began to be formed almost immediately after the end of the war. It can be said to begin with the popular show which Lowell Thomas put on in 1919 at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and which he called "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia." Five years later, in 1924, Thomas published *With Lawrence in Arabia,* which also proved to be highly popular, and which made Lawrence a familiar name and a thrilling legend to many more than could have seen the Covent Garden spectacle. Though this was not known at the time, it appears that Lawrence helped Thomas both with his show and his book. Two other works published before World War II were, in their turn, heavily indebted to Lawrence's help and inspiration. They spread the story of his wartime activities in a version which he approved, magnifying the significance of his adventures in the war against the Ottomans, and extolling the originality of his military tactics and doctrine. These books were *Lawrence and the Arabs* by Robert Graves, which came out in 1927, and *"T.E. Lawrence": In Arabia and After* by B. H. Liddell Hart. These two books, written in the one case by a poet and man of letters, and in the other by a notable and influential writer on military topics, would be respectfully received in circles whom Lowell Thomas's productions may not have impressed. Again, after his death, Lawrence's brother, Arnold, edited a symposium, *T.E. Lawrence and his Friends* (1937), in which contributors drawn from various walks of life combined to present an impressive picture of a many-sided, indeed a universal, genius.

But, of course, the most powerful by far of all the accounts which served to establish the received version of Lawrence's life and activities were his own writings: *Revolt in the Desert,* an abridgement of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* published in 1927; and *Seven Pillars* itself, which was first issued in a small "subscribers' " edition in 1926, and in a trade edition in 1935, immediately after his death. Both works were instant best-sellers in English and other languages, and *Seven Pillars* indeed continues to sell steadily, to judge by the frequency of its reprints. To these two works we may add Lawrence's *Letters,* published in 1938, which were selected and edited by the well-known writer, David Garnett. Together with *Seven Pillars,* the *Letters* served firmly to establish in the public mind Lawrence's *persona* very much as he himself wished to have it established: a brave and heroic spirit who had championed a downtrodden nationality, and led it brilliantly and victoriously against its oppressors, only to be let down and double-crossed by his own government—a government which, out of greed and cowardice, defaulted on promises solemnly given to the Arabs. This tormented spirit, therefore, out of shame and remorse, gave up a brilliant career, enlisted as a private in the Royal Air Force, and spent the rest of his life in menial and humdrum obscurity, managing, nonetheless, to produce a literary and historical masterpiece.

This, we might say, was Lawrence by Lawrence and his friends. The veracity of all this literature in depicting Lawrence's character, activities, and significance was generally, not to say universally, accepted. This remained the case until the appearance in 1955 of Richard Aldington's *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry.* The most important, indeed practically the only, new source which Aldington had at his disposal consisted of a number of letters which Lawrence had addressed to Mrs. Bernard Shaw, which had become available at the British Museum, and in which he disclosed that he had been born out of wedlock, and described the devastating effect which the discovery of this fact had had on his life. Aldington put a great deal of weight on Lawrence's illegitimacy

ELIE KEDOURIE is professor of politics at the London School of Economics and Fellow of the British Academy. Among his many books are *Nationalism, England, and the Middle East, The Chatham House Version, Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies,* and, most recently, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth.*

Commentary July 1957

The Real T. E. Lawrence

Elie Kedourie

DURING his lifetime, and even more so after his death, Colonel T. E. Lawrence, "Lawrence of Arabia," was the subject of a great deal of curiosity and speculation. The literature about him is voluminous and varied, ranging from accounts of his military career during World War I and his political activities afterward, to investigations of his private life, and explanations—sometimes involved and farfetched, and sometimes downright sensational—of his personality and behavior.

The Lawrence corpus—as we may call it—began to be formed almost immediately after the end of the war. It can be said to begin with the popular show which Lowell Thomas put on in 1919 at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and which he called "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia." Five years later, in 1924, Thomas published *With Lawrence in Arabia,* which also proved to be highly popular, and which made Lawrence a familiar name and a thrilling legend to many more than could have seen the Covent Garden spectacle. Though this was not known at the time, it appears that Lawrence helped Thomas both with his show and his book. Two other works published before World War II were, in their turn, heavily indebted to Lawrence's help and inspiration. They spread the story of his wartime activities in a version which he approved, magnifying the significance of his adventures in the war against the Ottomans, and extolling the originality of his military tactics and doctrine. These books were *Lawrence and the Arabs* by Robert Graves, which came out in 1927, and *"T.E. Lawrence": In Arabia and After* by B. H. Liddell Hart. These two books, written in the one case by a poet and man of letters, and in the other by a notable and influential writer on military topics, would be respectfully received in circles whom Lowell Thomas's productions may not have impressed. Again, after his death, Lawrence's brother, Arnold, edited a symposium, *T.E. Lawrence and his Friends* (1937), in which contributors drawn from various walks of life combined to present an impressive picture of a many-sided, indeed a universal, genius.

But, of course, the most powerful by far of all the accounts which served to establish the received version of Lawrence's life and activities were his own writings: *Revolt in the Desert,* an abridgement of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* published in 1927; and *Seven Pillars* itself, which was first issued in a small "subscribers' " edition in 1926, and in a trade edition in 1935, immediately after his death. Both works were instant best-sellers in English and other languages, and *Seven Pillars* indeed continues to sell steadily, to judge by the frequency of its reprints. To these two works we may add Lawrence's *Letters,* published in 1938, which were selected and edited by the well-known writer, David Garnett. Together with *Seven Pillars,* the *Letters* served firmly to establish in the public mind Lawrence's *persona* very much as he himself wished to have it established: a brave and heroic spirit who had championed a downtrodden nationality, and led it brilliantly and victoriously against its oppressors, only to be let down and double-crossed by his own government—a government which, out of greed and cowardice, defaulted on promises solemnly given to the Arabs. This tormented spirit, therefore, out of shame and remorse, gave up a brilliant career, enlisted as a private in the Royal Air Force, and spent the rest of his life in menial and humdrum obscurity, managing, nonetheless, to produce a literary and historical masterpiece.

This, we might say, was Lawrence by Lawrence and his friends. The veracity of all this literature in depicting Lawrence's character, activities, and significance was generally, not to say universally, accepted. This remained the case until the appearance in 1955 of Richard Aldington's *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry.* The most important, indeed practically the only, new source which Aldington had at his disposal consisted of a number of letters which Lawrence had addressed to Mrs. Bernard Shaw, which had become available at the British Museum, and in which he disclosed that he had been born out of wedlock, and described the devastating effect which the discovery of this fact had had on his life. Aldington put a great deal of weight on Lawrence's illegitimacy

ELIE KEDOURIE is professor of politics at the London School of Economics and Fellow of the British Academy. Among his many books are *Nationalism, England, and the Middle East, The Chatham House Version, Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies,* and, most recently, *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth.*

(which, though it had been mentioned in print in one or two places, was not then generally known) and on Lawrence's reaction to it, in order to account for Lawrence's public and private conduct.

Such an explanation of Lawrence and his activities was also favored by Anthony Nutting, who served as principal adviser to Sam Spiegel during the production of the film, *Lawrence of Arabia*. In his *Lawrence of Arabia: The Man and the Motive* published in 1961, Nutting took the line that Lawrence's bastardy gave him an assertive personality, and made him want to prove that he was as good as, if not better than, those born in wedlock—hence his vision of himself as a messiah destined to lead the Arabs to salvation. To this psychohistory (as we may now call it) Nutting added another ingredient. In November 1917, Lawrence—according to his own account—was arrested while on a reconnaissance mission in Deraa, then under Ottoman control, and taken to the Ottoman commander. What exactly happened before he was set free the following morning Lawrence left somewhat vague, but he hinted that apart from being savagely beaten, he was also sexually assaulted by, or on the orders of, the commander. This incident left Lawrence—so Nutting argued—a "rabid masochist." His sense of mission was lost "and his motors were henceforth driven by an unvarnished ambition and lust for power."

The explanations which Aldington and Nutting put before us are highly speculative. They depend entirely, in the first place, on Lawrence's own unsubstantiated assertions; but even if we knew, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Lawrence's reactions to his illegitimacy were as he described them, and that he was really arrested, beaten, and sexually assaulted in Deraa, it would still be impossible for us to link these occurrences to his military and political activities. To do so we would require specific evidence showing, for example, that the events of Deraa governed Lawrence's decisions in the conduct of a particular battle, or that the shame of his illegitimacy led him to adopt a particular line in a political negotiation. And such evidence is, of necessity, impossible to obtain. But it is not only Nutting's and Aldington's accounts which these considerations render doubtful and shaky, it is the whole enterprise of psychohistory.

Though Aldington relied heavily on the facts of Lawrence's birth, and on Lawrence's supposed reaction to these facts, his book is by no means concerned only with this issue. Aldington also casts a cold and critical glance over the public events in which Lawrence was involved; and though he did not have at his disposal the documents which have become available with the opening of the archives in the 1960's, he was yet able to throw legitimate doubt on a great many of the incidents connected with the Arab revolt and its aftermath as Lawrence and his friends had depicted them. His book was received with great animosity and indignation. It is said that efforts were made to persuade the publishers to suppress it, and that one of Lawrence's friends wanted to give Aldington a public thrashing. Sir Ronald Storrs, whose voice in the chorus was particularly noticeable, denounced Aldington in a BBC broadcast as a mean and contemptible cad, traducing and maligning a hero who was "a touchstone and a standard of reality." Storrs—and others—also took great exception to Aldington's revealing to the world at large the fact of Lawrence's illegitimate birth, particularly when his mother was still alive.

It is undoubtedly very praiseworthy to preserve and defend the privacy of public figures—and it was, of course, entirely because of his public activities that Lawrence attracted so much attention. But it must be said that Lawrence himself was the first to tincture public affairs with his own private passions, thus inaugurating the dangerous and pernicious fashion which so many of his biographers—and detractors—were to follow.

In the course of expatiating over Aldington's unspeakable malice, Storrs, with haughty contempt, remarked: "To what purpose has this been done? . . . What can be the gratification in attempting to destroy a famous name—an inspiration to youth all over the free world?" Storrs's exalted language in referring to Lawrence as "an inspiration to youth all over the free world" is by no means exceptional. Lawrence seems to have attracted, from the time when his career became generally—albeit inaccurately—known, this kind of extravagant hyperbole. Perhaps the best example of this exaggeration occurs in a sermon preached by the Reverend L.B. Cross, Chaplain of Jesus College, Oxford (Lawrence's own college), at a memorial service held shortly after his death. The sermon drew parallels between Lawrence and Jesus. In both cases, the preacher declared, the period of preparation for their life's work lasted three years; both, again, received similar treatment from society; both were ascetic, and both felt the need to humble themselves before others.

Some thirteen years after the appearance of Aldington's book, such solemn and high-flown sentiments as those expressed by Storrs and Cross came to be viewed in an ironical light as a result of revelations which first appeared in 1968 in the London *Sunday Times,* and which were then substantially incorporated in a book published in 1969 and written by Phillip Knightley and Colin Simpson (the original authors of the articles), *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia.* According to these revelations, for twelve years, from 1923 to 1935, Lawrence induced a young Scotsman, John Bruce, to give him periodic beatings. These beatings were administered at the orders of a nonexistent uncle, conveyed in letters which Lawrence gave to Bruce—letters which in reality he himself had written. But Bruce, it would

seem, was not the only one whom Lawrence persuaded to give him beatings. At least two others were also involved, while a third, "a service companion" (as John E. Mack calls him in his recent biography, of which more below), was asked by Lawrence to witness the beatings, at the request of the mythical uncle, in order that he might report to him on Lawrence's reactions. According to this observer the beatings were administered with a metal whip on the bare buttocks, and Lawrence required the beatings to be "severe enough to produce a seminal emission."

These beatings and the bizarre arrangements associated with them had become known to Lawrence's family and friends immediately after his death. We learn from *The Secret Lives* that Mrs. Bernard Shaw interviewed Bruce in 1935 in a solicitor's office and asked him to refrain from publishing what he knew. As in the case of the facts relating to his birth, this attempt to protect Lawrence's privacy is natural and entirely laudable. On such matters the only seemly thing for those involved is absolute silence. But some might find surprising that his brother and literary executor, Professor Arnold Lawrence, should describe Lawrence's practices in a manner such that uninstructed readers—already fed on Thomas, Graves, Liddell Hart, and *Seven Pillars*—would inevitably be persuaded that Colonel Lawrence was indeed a superhuman being. In a piece published in 1937, Professor Lawrence referred in cryptic words to his brother's craving for flagellation, declaring that his "subjection of the body was achieved by methods advocated by the saints whose lives he had read."

The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia originated in John Bruce's story, which the *Sunday Times* purchased from him, but the authors' aim was decidedly more ambitious than the investigation of possibly scabrous revelations. Two years before Bruce's story appeared, British official records relating to World War I were opened to the public, and Knightley and Simpson thought to take advantage of this to examine Lawrence's role in war and politics. It cannot be said that this part of their book is a success. The British records are extremely voluminous and scattered, generated as they had been in a great many departments and agencies, and it is clear from *The Secret Lives* that the authors did not examine them with the necessary meticulousness—or perhaps did not have the time or leisure to examine, ponder, and make sense of this difficult material. Their account, therefore, of Lawrence's public career—which, after all, is the only reason for any interest in him—is uncritical and unsatisfactory. Here, the authors take for granted certain received ideas about British policies during and after the war; they are too ready to assume that the British broke promises and behaved shabbily toward the Arabs; and they have a tendency to pounce on a document and wrench it out of context simply because it seems to make a sensational revelation. Knightley and Simpson were privileged to have access to one source, namely, the collection of Lawrence's letters and papers at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, which is closed to the public until the year 2000. The conditions of their access to the collection are not clear, but the authors do say that apart from giving permission to quote letters, and some amendment of material which originally appeared in the *Sunday Times,* Professor Arnold Lawrence gave no assistance in the writing of the book. This would seem to imply that Professor Lawrence wished to keep his distance from *The Secret Lives of Lawrence of Arabia.*

This manifestly is not the case with the longest and most comprehensive biography of Lawrence to appear so far, *A Prince of Our Disorder,** which came out in 1976. Its author, John E. Mack, refers to and often quotes copiously from the Bodleian Library material and acknowledges Professor Lawrence's help at many points in his narrative. But this is not to say that Mack's work is the official or authorized biography. Such a work is now in preparation and has been entrusted to J. M. Wilson. Mack is by profession a psychiatrist, but his biography of Lawrence is by no means a psychohistory, though he does on occasion have recourse to a psychoanalytical explanation of his hero's character and some of his activities. These explanations are not very convincing, but it is not by them that his work has to be judged. Like any other biography, its merits depend on the author's ability to show that he has used all the available evidence, and that he has made use of this evidence persuasively and cogently—that, in short, he has painted a lifelike picture.

MACK's book is very long—over five hundred pages of text and footnotes. And, in keeping perhaps with its length, it bears a grandiose title: a prince Mack proclaims Lawrence to be, a prince of our disorder. The appellation Mack takes from an essay on Lawrence by Irving Howe which purports to investigate the "problem of heroism." The portentous metaphor is no doubt meant to indicate that Lawrence's life and doings are emblems and exemplars of the human condition. This seems to be Mack's belief, for he tells us that Lawrence's case is particularly important to the "psychologically minded biographer," because "to a varying degree we all share some of his characteristics." Compared to the magniloquence of the title, the cautious and elastic qualifications at first sight disappoint, let down. But in truth it was prudent of Mack to retreat from the wide claim made by his title, for after all it is not true that Lawrence's "disorder" afflicts all of humanity: we do not all, as adults, feel ourselves to be deceivers because we were deceived as children—if indeed this is what happened to Lawr-

* Little, Brown, 561 pp., $15.00.

ence, as Mack obscurely claims; we are not all flagellants; nor are we all compelled, as again Mack says Lawrence was compelled, to live out the demands of our inner life in the public domain.

Mack is not the only writer to endow Lawrence and his misadventures with a universal, a cosmic, significance. A recent work, *Lawrence of Arabia: The Literary Impulse* by Stanley and Rodelle Weintraub (1975), claims that to dismiss Lawrence (as Herbert Read had done) as "an uneasy adventurer," "an Oxford graduate with a civilian and supercilious lack of discipline," "a mind not great with thought, but tortured by some restless spirit that drives it out into the desert, to physical folly and self-immolation," is to dismiss not so much Lawrence as the 20th century. To identify the 20th century—such as it is—with these particular characteristics smacks of the extravagance to which so many writers on the subject of Lawrence are driven.

In keeping with his view of Lawrence as an exemplar and an archetype, Mack adopts toward his hero a solemn and reverential tone. With meticulous detail he chronicles the events of Lawrence's infancy and childhood: how he was breastfed for at least a year; how early in his second year he had to be rescued from a high window ledge, which he had reached by climbing over a sewing machine; how as a child he ate chiefly porridge and bananas, while as an undergraduate he liked cakes and fruits; and how on a walking tour in Brittany he carried two pairs of socks and wore one pair. Mack goes to great trouble in order to guide us through the adventures of the boy Lawrence, dressed in his blue-and-white striped jerseys, expatiating on the excitement, humor, and sense of delightful mischief which he inspired in his playmates; he has even tracked down and recorded the testimony of "the only girl to my knowledge to pass under the city of Oxford in a punt with Lawrence." This hagiographical style —as it may fairly be called—is the outcome of Mack's clear conviction that by 1914 (when Lawrence was twenty-six years old) his subject had proved himself to be an "unusual, versatile, and reasonably well-balanced genius." It has to be said that, unless it is seen with the eyes of faith, the material which Mack puts before us warrants no such judgment. At twenty-six Lawrence had shown himself to be a lively, spirited, and intelligent young archeologist—but one who, whatever his promise, had yet to make his mark. And he was assuredly not the only young man of promise in his generation, nor the only such young man subsequently to make his mark.

As it happened, he made his mark not in archeology but in war and politics and, as has been said earlier, it is what he did in this sphere which entitles him to our notice. This Mack in part explicitly recognizes when he says that the years 1917-18—the two years of Lawrence's participation in the Arab revolt in the Hijaz, led by Sharif Hussein, against the Ottoman Turks—were the most critical of Lawrence's life, and the two hundred pages and more which the book devotes to the period 1914-22 also constitute an implicit acknowledgment of this. But these pages, which are the core of the book, are also what is least satisfactory in it. For extensive as are the sources which Mack has used, they are not nearly extensive enough. Between 1916 and 1922 Lawrence was involved in a complex web of war, politics, and diplomacy. For a biographer to give an accurate and intelligible account of his role, he would have to place this role in its proper historical context—and this requires studying and digesting and working into his own narrative the evidence disclosed by the voluminous records which the Sharifian revolt and its aftermath generated in British—and to a lesser extent, in French—archives. No biographer of Lawrence could have done this before 1966, simply because the records were not then available. Knightley and Simpson were the first to explore the new material, but theirs was a hurried and perfunctory foray. It cannot be said that Mack has improved on them to any extent. His footnotes, it is true, do refer here and there to various volumes of Foreign Office and Cabinet documents, but those who know how rich and extensive the public archives of this period are will also know that Mack has, regrettably, done no more than scratch their surface.

THIS failure to consult and take into account the available evidence, and the reliance on authors who either did not have access to this evidence or who, like George Antonius, are so suspect as to be worthless, have made Mack's historical judgment uncritical and unreliable. If he had attended to the evidence he would, for instance, not have unquestioningly accepted Lawrence's false assertion the the British authorities in Cairo heard of the Sykes-Picot agreement—which embodied Anglo-French arrangements about the postwar fate of Ottoman territories—only in 1917. The truth is that these authorities knew of the provisions of the agreement as soon as it was signed, and furthermore had been kept regularly informed of the progress of the negotiations. Again, Mack uncritically accepts Lawrence's version of the Sharifian revolt and its achievements, saying, for example, that the capture of Aqaba in July 1917—in which Lawrence played a major role —ended the war in Hijaz, made Sinai secure for the British, and provided them with "a vital seaport." The truth is that the capture of Aqaba did not end the war in the Hijaz, where Medina remained under Ottoman occupation until January 1919 and where hostilities between Sharif Hussein and Ibn Saud were continually threatening; that Sinai had ceased to be threatened by the Ottomans quite a while before the Sharifian revolt (and that if it had been under Ottoman threat, it was not

the Sharifian occupation of Aqaba which would have removed this threat); and that Aqaba, an insignificant hamlet on the Red Sea, neither was (nor could have been) a vital seaport for the provisioning of British armies advancing to attack the Ottomans up the Mediterranean coast.

Mack also entertains the bizarre idea that half of General Townshend's force (which the Ottomans besieged and forced to surrender at Kut in Mesopotamia in April 1916) was Arab; however, it is well known that if Arabs fought at all in Mesopotamia, they did so on the side of the Ottomans, or simply to harass and despoil British troops. On this elementary mistake Mack erects a heavy structure of sententious disapproval. The war in Mesopotamia, he tells us, shows "the futility, and ultimately the terrible danger, for *all* the population involved, of a Western power's pursuing its national politics on foreign soil with utter disregard for the nature and political aspirations of the local population." Even if the events which have elicited this comment did actually take place, the comment itself remains eccentric and highly-strung. For, after all, war is not a monopoly of the West. Again, absolutely no warrant exists for the belief that "a local population" pursuing its own "political aspirations" will not suffer disaster; likewise, no warrant exists for denying that a "local population" may derive great benefits from rule by a foreign power—even though such a power is, of course, primarily intent on securing its own interests. It is because such conjunctions are continually arising that Clio may be called an ironic muse: history is not a morality tale in which elevated motives always lead to good results and low motives to bad results.

Mack seems a stranger to this, the oldest and most common worldly wisdom. Hence his ready acceptance of the slick and simplistic cant of the age, and his unconcealed and ready admiration for holy humbugs like Gandhi and Dag Hammarskjöld, to liken Lawrence to whom (he must believe) will elevate his hero in our estimation. The conjunction of these various influences—namely, the neglect of the evidence from the official archives, reliance on the conclusions of indifferent writers, uncritical acceptance of modish slogans and shibboleths—means that situations and episodes which must be at the center of any study of Lawrence are treated inadequately and unsatisfactorily. Thus, for instance, chapter 10 deals with the Hijaz under the Ottomans before and after the outbreak of war, and with the secret Sharifian negotiations with the British; it presents us with a simple story of Arabs yearning for national independence having to contend with Turkish oppression on the one hand and European "colonialist" greed on the other. This simple story is in its simplicity quite deceptive. For the relations between the Ottoman state and its Arabic-speaking subjects cannot be described merely as those between oppressor and oppressed. The Ottoman state was an Islamic state, and Islamic loyalty was a strong bond between rulers and ruled. Apart from the Sharif in the Hijaz (and the small number of Ottoman Arab officers who joined him), the Arabic-speaking provinces remained, in spite of the great wartime hardships, faithful to the empire until the end.

The Sharif, it is true, claimed to be the standard-bearer of Arabism, but this was a mere claim *pro domo,* unwise for the historian to accept as the reality. The reality, rather, was that the Sharif, like many of his predecessors in this post, was tempted to play the overmighty subject, and to exploit the remoteness of the Ottoman state from the Hijaz and the emergency of war. He was, in fact, one power among many in the Arabian Peninsula, the rival and sometimes bitter enemy of fellow Arab rulers. The affair of the deserting Ottoman officers who joined the Sharif is scarcely less complicated. These officers, moved by ideological passions, were the counterpart of the Young Turk officers, the authors of the *coup d'état* of July 1908 against the Ottoman Sultan. Together with the Young Turks, they may be considered an ominous manifestation of a new style of Middle Eastern politics which has since become quite familiar.

Mack's pages are innocent of these and similar complexities; nor do they convey to us a sense of the international context in which the Sharifian rebellion took place—of the traditional great-power connections and rivalries in the Middle East, or of the need of the powers (entirely as legitimate as that of the Sharif) to secure and preserve for themselves a strong position in the area. And what has been said about the deficiencies of Mack's account of the background of the Sharifian rebellion holds equally true of his perfunctory chapters dealing with the Paris Peace Conference and with Lawrence at the Colonial Office. The Peace Conference was a negotiation. The duty of the historian is to set out the interests of the various parties and describe how the bargaining proceeded, not to make question-begging and sentimental assertions such as that "Lawrence was one of the few voices of conscience" in Paris—as though the Sharifian interest had some transcendental merit denied to other interests, and as though the upholders of these other interests were conscienceless, rapacious sharks. Similarly, the policy which Lawrence supported and applied at the Colonial Office was, like any other policy, based on a medley of calculations and miscalculations; it is far from clear that its consequences were so excellent that his biographer must complacently endorse Lawrence's view that his part of "the Middle East job" was "on the whole, well done."

THERE is, of course, one other aspect of Lawrence's public life which a biographer must take into account, namely his mili-

tary activities in the Hijaz and Trans-Jordan. For it is these which became the foundation of his renown, not to say his legend. That he was resourceful and imaginative in leading Bedouin guerrillas, that he showed endurance and bravery in his activity, cannot be gainsaid. But the claims which he, and others on his behalf, made go much further than this. Liddell Hart, and now Mack, speak as though it were Lawrence who had invented the technique of guerrilla warfare. Mack, for instance, claims that Lawrence was "decades ahead of his time and his government" in understanding the actualities of guerrilla warfare. This is an absurd exaggeration since, as is well known and as has been extensively documented anew in Walter Laqueur's recent book on the subject, both the practice and the theory of guerrilla warfare are appreciably older than Lawrence. Lawrence himself spoke as though he had invented a bloodless way of winning battles. In the introductory chapter to *Seven Pillars,* he boldly affirms that the defeat of the Ottoman empire "was at last done in the wisdom of Allenby with less than four hundred killed, by turning to our uses the hands of the oppressed in Turkey." This exorbitant gasconade, worthy of Tartarin or Falstaff, is particularly piquant coming from someone who so much disliked professional soldiers.

This estimate of the efficiency of guerrilla warfare—which the long and difficult war between the Allies and the Ottomans serves to show up for the empty boast that it is—was combined with a doctrine which Lawrence held, at any rate in his early days in the Hijaz. He seems to have believed that what was going on in the Hijaz was much more than a *fronde* among often dissident tribesmen—a *fronde* being shrewdly made use of by an ambitious magnate. In a dispatch from the Hijaz of October 1916, Lawrence wrote:

> The Bedouin of the Hijaz is not, outwardly, a vehicle for abstract or altruistic ideas. Yet again and again I have heard from them about acts of the early Arabs or things that the Sharif and his sons have said, which contain nearly all that the exalted Arab patriot would wish. They intend to restore the Sheria, to revive the Arabic language, and to rebuild the prosperity of the country. They believe that by liberating the Hijaz they are vindicating the rights of all Arabs to a national political existence. . . .

The sequel was to show that these were far-fetched ideas, that the Bedouins remained what they ever had been—simply nomads who lived, whenever they could, by exaction and plunder. Lawrence's doctrine about them justifies us in calling him the Che Guevara of the Arab revolt; but, fortunately for him, he did not have to pay the price which Guevara paid for his fancies about the Bolivian peasants.

The doctrine also indicates that Lawrence in Arabia held simple and uncritical views on politics, views commonly described as "radical," or "anti-imperialist." Thus, in the introductory chapter of *Seven Pillars,* he declares that British soldiers, "young, clean, delightful fellows" were sent "to the worst of deaths, not to win the war, but that the corn and rice and oil of Mesopotamia might be ours." This is no more than the Hobsonian-Leninist notion that it is "capitalism" which causes war. These "anti-imperialist" sentiments remained with Lawrence after he enlisted as a private in the Royal Air Force. While serving in India, he informed Mrs. Shaw that "no native troops are loyal to their foreign masters: or rather, only those who had no self-respect would be loyal." This harsh verdict on the rank-and-file of the Indian army was an ideologue's verdict, both presumptuous and unjust: the Indian army under its British officers remained to the end in its overwhelming majority faithful to the British crown, and its men, whose lives were molded and given significance by loyalty to their regiments, are not to be dismissed, with injurious ignorance, as shifty and despicable traitors.

But whatever Lawrence's activities in the war and its aftermath, their actual import and significance is dwarfed by the retrospective account of his doings which he provided in *Seven Pillars,* and by the immense influence which this writing has exercised. For many years, Lawrence's friends and admirers pitched the merits of his writings very high indeed. To take one example, the *Times Literary Supplement* has recently revealed that it was Lawrence's patron and friend, D.G. Hogarth, who anonymously reviewed in its pages *Revolt in the Desert* when it appeared in 1927. Hogarth, we find, ends his review by affirming that "the book leaves from first to last an impression of absolute truth." Hogarth, who was as deeply involved in the Arab revolt as Lawrence himself, should have known better. It was this kind of glorification, repeated over the years *ad nauseam,* which no doubt led Aldington to speak somewhat unkindly of what he called the Lawrence Bureau.

Lawrence's most recent admirers have been more circumspect, less sweeping and categorical, in their praises. In their book mentioned above, the Weintraubs explain that though Lawrence "exaggerated and even invented some of the details in his narrative," this only serves to establish "his flair as a writer." Lawrence, they tell us, was simply engaged in "transmuting autobiographical chronicle into legend"; and, "despite its confessed inexactitude and subjectivity, it *is,*" they insist, "a work of history—a work which has the poetry of history." Mack, for his part, advances a number of explanations for what he describes as "distortions and partial truths" in *Seven Pillars.* He tells us in one place that their purpose is either embellishment "for dramatic purposes," or the protection of other people. In another place

he claims that "the distortions and inaccuracies result from Lawrence's need to elevate the tale to epic proportions and to make himself a contemporary legendary figure." Again, he explains that Lawrence's "tendency to fictionalize his experiences, to turn his life into a legend, was most prominent when Lawrence was feeling particularly troubled in his self-regard. At these times," Mack's diagnosis runs, "he would give way to an unconscious need to create a fictional self, drawn on lines of childish heroism, to replace the troubled self he was experiencing." In yet another passage, Mack invites us to consider Lawrence's literary labors as so many attempts to overcome the "continuing effects of traumatic experiences." Since these writings were meant to reach the public, Mack also invites us to look upon Lawrence as a benefactor—albeit an unwitting one—of the cause of mental health: "He would be glad, I am sure," Mack solemnly opines, "if his public self-exposure could contribute to human understanding and to the relief of suffering. He would, I am quite certain, want others to benefit from any knowledge or insights gained from studying and analyzing the struggles he could not resolve altogether for himself."

On the face of it, *Seven Pillars* is simply the account of a wartime episode. It requires some ingenuity to turn it into a myth, or a neurotic's confession requiring the analyst's transformative logic, to unlock its esoteric meaning and unveil its hidden significance. But whatever the analyst's skill, it is difficult to see *Seven Pillars* as a myth, like Gilgamesh or Prometheus or Oedipus. And if the book is a piece of self-exposure, the maunderings of a neurotic on his psychoanalyst's couch, it is not clear why it should benefit humanity at large: at the most the benefit will accrue to the patient himself and to his doctor. All this laborious huffing and puffing, in short, sounds uncommonly like apologetics—which are necessary, since the fact cannot be got over that at certain points, some of them crucial, *Seven Pillars* is knowingly and deliberately untruthful. Lawrence, for instance, knew that Faysal, third son of the Sharif of Mecca, whose champion he became, was a timid, perhaps even a cowardly, man in battle, and lacking in judgment, and yet he portrayed him in *Seven Pillars* as a heroic figure, "the leader who would bring the Arab revolt to full glory." He chose to disguise the truth because—as he later told Liddell Hart—it was "the only way to get the British to support the Arabs—physical courage is an essential demand of the typical British officer." This may have been a necessary—albeit questionable—proceeding when Lawrence was acting as Faysal's champion. To perpetuate the deception in a work later composed at leisure is to take advantage of the reader's good faith. But perhaps the most flagrant example of this abuse is Lawrence's account of the fall of Damascus. The reader of *Seven Pillars* is led to believe that the city was captured by Faysal's forces, when the truth was—as Lawrence well knew—that on Allenby's orders all Allied forces were forbidden to enter Damascus, only Faysal's being allowed to do so, and thus—falsely—to claim its capture.

LAWRENCE'S book, we may then fairly say, is a corrupt work, which deliberately sets out to induce in its readers—by means of falsehoods—feelings of admiration, pity, indignation, and guilt, in respect of events which in reality do not possess that tragic quality for which such emotions are appropriate. The political and military events in which Lawrence was mixed up, and which in his fashion he later recounted, involved conflicting interests and ambitions, no single one of which was, however, particularly righteous or signally elevated. *Seven Pillars* pretends to the contrary, and by transforming the mediocre and the shady into noble and exalted beings, the book is not only corrupt but also corrupting—corrupting in a manner particularly familiar to the modern age, when political causes have come to be endowed with transcendental significance, to warrant the greatest sacrifices and justify the most heinous crimes. This kind of corruption may properly be called romantic, since it rests on yearning for a harmonious or paradisaical existence to be established or regained by means of political action.

Evidence of such romanticism is abundant in Lawrence's writings. Consider, for instance, the dedicatory poem which stands at the beginning of *Seven Pillars*. It is not known for sure to whom the poem is dedicated, but such evidence as exists points to Dahoum, a donkey boy who was employed on the diggings at Jerablus, and with whom Lawrence established a close relationship. But whatever the identity of the person to whom the poem (and the book) is dedicated, the poem itself is clearly erotic. It begins: "I loved you," and its third stanza constitutes a typically romantic amalgam in which love and death are simultaneously and nostalgically evoked:

> Love, the way-weary, groped to your body, our
> brief wage ours for the moment
> Before earth's soft hand explored your shape,
> and blind worms grew fat upon
> Your substance.

Not only is this love poem—memorial of a private relationship—made to stand at the head of a book dealing with public events, but it is also itself made to affirm that the writer's actions in war and politics were motivated by a desire to give pleasure to the loved one. The first stanza reads:

> I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into
> my hands
> and wrote my will across the sky in stars
> To earn you Freedom, the seven-pillared worthy
> house,
> that your eyes might be shining for me
> When we came.

We may add that the poem, as it figures in *Seven Pillars,* was amended and toned down by Robert Graves, and that Lawrence's original version—as Knightley and Simpson show in their book—was palpably more explicit. It is all very peculiar.

Equally peculiar is the fact that while Lawrence's biographers have speculated a great deal on the identity of the person to whom it is dedicated, they have seldom paused to consider the significance of what the bare text of the poem so revealingly discloses about Lawrence's attitude to politics and public affairs. The poem, and other statements by Lawrence, indicate that he was perhaps homosexually inclined. Mack quotes a passage from some unpublished notes made for a projected autobiography in which Lawrence declares: "I take no pleasure in women. I have never thought twice or even once of the shape of a woman: but men's bodies, in repose or in movement—especially the former, appeal to me directly and very generally." Side by side with this disgust for the female sex went hatred for generation and childbirth which, he told Mrs. Bernard Shaw, was "so sorry and squalid an accident . . . if fathers and mothers took thought before bringing children into this misery of a world, only the monsters among them would dare to go through with it." Such an outlook, so much at variance with the common experience of mankind, has for its corollary a view of politics in which are entirely absent those aims usually held to justify political activity —namely, the preservation and perpetuation of a human group. Hence perhaps Lawrence's occasionally wild and nihilistic outbursts, such as this one which occurs toward the end of *Seven Pillars*: "To the clear-sighted, failure was the only goal. We must believe, through and through, that there was no victory except to go down in death fighting and crying for failure itself."

IN THE dedicatory poem which inaugurates *Seven Pillars,* Lawrence boasts that "I drew these tides of men into my hands and wrote my will across the sky in stars." Here the self, by a sheer exercise of will, claims to master the world. In *The Mint,* which consists of sketches describing his life as an enlisted man in the Royal Air Force, Lawrence's attitude is the very opposite. The self is now wholly mastered by the world, governed by abject fear which, however, is perhaps as pleasurable as absolute domination: *les extrêmes se touchent.* He writes: "The root-trouble is fear: fear of failing, fear of breaking down." And: "My soul, always looking for some fear to salt its existence, was wondering what seven whole years of servitude would do against the hasty stubbornness which had hitherto buttressed my values." Having, in his search for a superhuman harmony, attempted (and failed) to soar to the heights, he would now seek the ineffable by immersing himself in a bovine existence where "unquestioned life is a harmony": "here are men so healthy that they don't chop up their meat into mince for easy digestion by the mind: and who are thereby intact as we are thereby diseased." Therefore, deliberately, now preferring his world "backwards in the mirror," Lawrence abandoned himself to the "urge downwards, in pursuit of the safety which can't fall further." It did not work: *qui veut faire l'ange,* as Pascal said, *fait la bête*; but not vice versa.

Lawrence's record, then, shows bravery in war, a great capacity for physical endurance, ingenuity as a guerrilla leader, and later some literary talent. But it also shows that he was self-centered, mercurial, and violently unstable. In his concluding chapter Mack notes that Lawrence "sought *new possibilities* for the self." But this cannot redound to his praise, as Mack evidently means it to do. For these possibilities and the quest for them can be mischievous and even catastrophic. So in Lawrence's case they have proved to be—not only in his own restless and unhappy life, but also in the example which he set, and which his legend (which he took such care to put together and to promote) made immensely popular. Mack's further verdict, that Lawrence was a civilizing force, cannot therefore stand. The cause of Arab nationalism which he embraced (and which he falsely claimed to have been double-crossed and betrayed by his country) was not more virtuous or worthy than any similar cause. Why a foreigner should so fervently embrace it, and what it has contributed to civilization, are both quite obscure. Lawrence, on the other hand, promoted a pernicious confusion between public and private, he looked to politics for a spiritual satisfaction which it cannot possibly provide, and he invested it with an impossibly transcendental significance. In doing so, he pandered to some of the most dangerous elements to be found in the modern Western mentality. His influence and his cult, here at their most extensive and enduring, we may judge to be not civilizing, but destructive.